DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 560 CG 016 586

AUTHOR Mullis, Ann K.; Mullis, Ronald L.
TITLE Satisfactions of Parenting.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Washington, DC, October 13-16, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Measures; *Child Rearing; Coping; Family Problems; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Child Relationship; Parent Role; *Parents; *Participant Satisfaction; Social Support Groups; *Stress Variables

ABSTRACT

The transition to parenthood has been described as both stressful and rewarding. To further clarify attitudes toward parenthood and suggest strategies for enhancing the satisfaction and reducing stress, 819 families responded to a 14-item questionnaire about parents' attitudes. Percent of agreement or disagreement was calculated for each item for all subjects and across the variables of number of children, years married, age of mother, and marital status. A majority of the respondents, 72%, indicated positive attitudes toward child rearing and parenthood. Those expressing more negative attitudes were younger parents and single parents. No differences were revealed for any items across the variables of rural/urban residence, education of mother or father, or age of child. The findings suggest that parents who have particular problems adjusting to their role need to be identified and provided with informal support systems of older parents. Child care classes for students can provide both concrete and theoretical parenting situations to help students confront real life issues. (JAC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED228560

Satisfactions of Parenting

Ann K. Mullis and Ronald L. Mullis
Child Development and Family Relations
North Dakota State University

Running Head: Satisfactions

CG 016586

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ron Mullis
Ann Mullis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Satisfactions of Parenting

Parenting has been defined by Brooks (1981) as a continuing series of interactions between parent and child, aimed at helping children to grow into healthy, independent, responsible adults (p.19). The roles and tasks of parenting are necessarily acquired abruptly with the birth of a child. With this new acquisition, there are social expectations about what parents should do. By comparison, later normative changes during the parental career occur more gradually as children reach preschool or school age.

Historically, transition to parenthood has been discussed as a stressful time (Dyer, 1963; LeMasters, 1957). More recently, however, parenthood has been viewed as a time during which parents can become more satisfied with their lives, stimulating the development of personal characteristics and new abilities. It is this dichotomous notion of parenting which remains difficult to assess.

Burgess and Locke (1945) define satisfaction as the correspondence between the actual and the expected. That is, the more closely one's actual experiences with major life events such as marriage and parenthood and one's expectations of those experiences coincide, the more positive the satisfaction level. Previous investigations (Hicks and Platt, 1971; Lewis

and Spanier, 1979) have revealed multiple correlates of parental satisfaction. These include positive relationships between parental satisfaction and higher occupational status, income, and educational level of husband. More specifically, studies of parental satisfaction over the life cycle indicate a general decline in satisfaction after the birth of the first child (Burr, 1970; Rollins and Cannon, 1974; Rollins and Feldman, 1970). This decline continues through school age or adolescence with an increase in satisfaction as children are launched (Burr, 1970; Rollins and Cannon, 1974; Rollins and Feldman, 1970). Chilman (1980) has pointed out the scholarly and popular emphasis on the burdens and stresses of parenthood with little previous research on the subject of parent satisfactions. This study is an attempt to further clarify attitudes toward aspects of parenthood and to suggest strategies for enhancing the satisfaction and reducing the stress associated with parenting.

Procedure

A forced choice questionnaire was developed to obtain information concerning parents' attitudes toward childrearing. Many of the items were based on previous research in the areas of child and adolescent development, parent attitudes and behaviors, marital satisfactions, and so on. The instrument was pretested with 144 families. Following the pretest, final

changes were made resulting in the fourteen item questionnaire. Subjects were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each item by circling a number from 1 to 5 with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 representing strongly disagree.

Subjects. The questionnaire was distributed to 1500 families. Subjects were selected through randomly selected schools in each of the eight State Department of Social Service planning regions of North Dakota. Four rural and four urban schools were selected from each planning region. In each cooperating school, children in first, third, and sixth grades were provided with a questionnaire to take home to their parents. The completed questionnaires were returned to researchers at North Dakota State University. A total of 819 families returned the survey, 463 rural families and 356 urban families. A breakdown of respondents by residence and grade of child is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The demographic information indicated that most of the respondents were married (95% of the sample) with five percent either divorced, separated or widowed. Thirty-two percent of the sample had been married for 16 years or longer. The majority of parents responding to the questionnaire were

between 30 and 39 years old (62%), with 15 percent between 20 and 29 years old, 19 percent between 40 and 49 years old and 4 percent between 50 and 59 years old. All but 7 percent of the sample had completed high school. A majority of the respondents (64%) had between one and three children and the remaining respondents (36%) had more than three children in the home.

Data Analysis. The percent of agreement or disagreement was calculated for each item for all subjects and across the following variables: number of children, years married, age of mother and marital status.

Results and Discussion

Seventy-two percent of 819 respondents indicated positive attitudes toward childrearing and parenthood. No differences were revealed for any items across the variables of rural/urban residence, education of mother, education of father and age of child.

Three items seemed to differentiate consistently between respondents. These were item 4 (If people knew all of the burdens of being a parent, fewer would choose to be parents.), item 8 (Satisfaction with parenthood is a matter of how well the children behave.), and item 10 (Persons who do not have children are often very unhappy.). In addition, other items seemed to differentiate when examined across selected

variables. See Table 2 for percentage of parent agreement and disagreement across childrearing items.

Insert Table 2 about here

Number of Children. As number of children increases, parents reported more agreement with two statements: item 8 (Satisfaction with parenthood is a matter of how well the children behave.) and item 10 (Persons who do not have children are often very unhappy.). This may indicate the need for more control of children's behavior as number of children in the home increases. Despite the emphasis on good behavior, parents seem to feel that children add a positive dimension to their lives.

Years Married. The respondents indicated that with increased length of marriage there was an increase in agreement with two items. They were item 8 and item 9 (Parenthood makes most husbands and wives feel closer to one another.). The element of control is again evident. There may be several possible explanations for this related to number and age of children. Perhaps parents who are married longer and have more children and well-behaved children, tend to express a more organized and satisfying family life. Item 8 may indicate that parents find common interests and involvement through the

childrearing process. This interaction may enable husbands and wives to become closer.

Age of Mother. As the age of mother increases, there appeared to be more agreement with items 8 and 10. This is consistent with the results of the number of children variable. In addition, the youngest mothers reported a higher percentage of agreement with item 13 (When I think about being a parent I have very mixed feelings.). Age of mother may be a strong indicator of degree of comfort with the parenting role. Younger mothers have been found to be less sure of themselves in childrearing, hence the mixed feelings about parenthood. This changes as mothers age; they have more experience with the parent role and this may increase their perceived value of parenthood and their level of competency in this role. With age it is likely that mothers feel a greater need for well-behaved children, perhaps as a reflection of their parenting ability and increased expectations of their child's overall social skills.

Marital Status. Though they comprised only 5% of the sample, single parents showed more agreement than married parents with item 2 (Parenthood today often means reducing one's chances for success.) and item 12 (If I could do things over again I would not choose to be a parent.). It is widely accepted that single parents experience more stress than married parents. The single parent respondents in this survey

follow this pattern. Parenthood was viewed as limiting and perhaps something to be re-evaluated following separation, divorce or death of a spouse.

Summary and Implications for Building Family Strengths

The results of this study are similar to those of Chilman's (1980) Milwaukee study, parents are expressing generally positive feelings with regard to their childrearing role. Those parents expressing more negative childrearing attitudes were younger parents and single parents.

There are a number of implications derived from this study of parenting attitudes. One suggestion is that the positive aspects of parenthood be emphasized. This might mean identifying parents who may have difficulty adjusting to their parental role, i.e., first-time parents and single parents, and providing them with informal support networks of older parents who would provide them with needed advice and support. It is becoming more and more evident that many first-time parents are waiting until their late 20's and 30's to have their first child. This trend moves the bulk of childrearing into the middle years for adults. For middle-aged parents, the expectations of parenting may be more realistic than that of younger adults. However, middle-aged parents may be more reluctant to seek information by virtue of their age and status unless they fully trust the source and the usefulness of the childrearing information. There is ample parent education research which indicates that parents

seek out and value childrearing advice from other people, especially professionals and their own parents. Thus, older parents and in-laws need to become a recognized and valuable part of a parent education and support network identified and made functional by concerned family educators.

In addition to providing support for current parents, introduction to "realistic" marriage and parenthood could be initiated in elementary and junior high school. Many pre- and early adolescents have unrealistic expectations of parenthood. These expectations can become stumbling blocks to successful parenting. For instance, first-time parents often assume that loving their children is enough. But as infants develop into toddlers and toddlers into preschoolers and so on, parents soon find that their role and their child's role changes over time. Adolescents need this information. They need to know that single parenting and childrearing frustrations are within the realm of possibilities for them if they select marriage and a family later in life. This content could be integrated in human development, psychology, sociology, home economics and occupational child care classes. A problem-solving approach would be one way to assist students in developing strategies for dealing with the many activities of childrearing. Perhaps child care classes for boys and girls can provide both concrete and theoretical parenting situations which help them to confront "real life" issues.

References

Brooks, Jane B. The Process of Parenting. Mayfield Publishing Company, 1981.

Burgess, E. W. & Locke, H. J. The family: From instutition to companionship. New York: American Book, 1945.

Burr, W. Satisfaction with various aspects of marriage over the life cycle: A random middle-class sample. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1970, 32, 29-37.

Chilman, C. S. Parent satisfaction, concerns, and goals for their children. Family Relations, 1980, 29, 339-345.

Dyer, E. Parenthood as a crisis: a restudy. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1963, 25, 196-201.

Hicks, M. W. & Platt, M. Marital happiness and stability: A review of research in the sixties. In C. B. Broderick (ed.), A decade review of family research and action. Minneapolis: National Council on Family Relations, 1971.

LeMasters, E. Parenthood as crisis. Marriage and Family Living, 1957, 19, 352-355.

Lewis, R. A. & Spanier, G. B. Theorizing about the quality and stability of marriage. In W. R. Burr, R. Hill, I.F.N.Y.E. & I.L. Reiss (eds.), Contemporary theories about the family. New York: Free Press, 1979.

Rollins, B. C. & Cannon, K. L. Marital satisfaction over the family life cycle: A re-evaluation. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1974, 36, 271-282.

Rollins, B. C. & Feldman, H. Marital satisfaction over the family life cycle. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1970, 32, 20-28.

Table 1

The Sample Parent Groups

Groups		Number Sent	Number Responding	Percent of Families Responding
Grade 1	Rural	250	154	18.8
	Urban	250	127	15.6
Grade 3	Rural	250	160	19.5
	Urban	250	111	13.5
Grade 6	Rural	250	149	18
	Urban	250	118	14.6
Total		1500	819	100

Note. Families living in communities of less than 2,500 people were classified as rural, remaining families were classified as urban.

Table 2

Parents of School Aged Children: Attitudes Towards Childrearing*

Childrearing Items	All Subjects N=819		# of Children 1-3 N=528		# of Children 4> N=291		Years Married 1-15 N=559		Years Married 16> N=260		Age of Mother 20-29 N=126		Age of Mother 3-39 N=510		Age of Mother 40> N=183		Marital Status Single N=51		Marital Status Married N=768	
	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D
1. Parenthood is one of my greatest satisfactions.	96	4	98	2	97	3	97	3	97	3	100	0	98	2	95	5	92	8	98	2
2. Parenthood today often means reducing one's chances for success.	24	76	24	76	24	76	26	74	23	77	27	73	31	69	22	78	59	41	23	77
3. Overall I think my life has been much happier because of my children.	98	2	98	2	97	3	96	4	100	0	100	0	98	2	96	4	92	8	97	3
4. If people knew all of the burdens of being a parent fewer would choose to be parents.	44	56	44	56	44	56	43	57	42	58	50	50	44	56	43	57	41	59	44	56
5. My life would be dull without my children.	89	11	89	11	88	12	86	14	90	10	93	2	87	13	87	13	88	12	68	32
6. I would not hesitate to encourage my friends to have children.	83	17	83	17	88	12	84	16	90	10	94	7	83	17	87	13	82	18	85	15
7. Parenthood has more positive than negative aspects today.	94	6	94	6	91	9	91	9	94	6	94	7	96	4	87	13	88	12	92	8
8. Satisfaction with parenthood is a matter of how well the children behave.	51	49	51	49	69	31	55	45	71	29	39	61	55	44	75	25	67	33	59	41
9. Parenthood makes most husbands and wives feel closer to one another.	86	14	86	14	88	12	55	45	90	10	87	13	85	15	87	13	78	22	87	13
10. Persons who do not have children are often very unhappy.	29	71	29	71	51	49	38	62	45	55	33	67	47	53	60	40	40	60	38	62
11. I sometimes feel betrayed by those who encouraged me to have children.	9	91	9	91	9	91	7	93	10	90	13	87	6	94	13	87	16	84	8	92
12. If I could do things over again, I would not choose to be a parent.	8	82	8	92	9	91	9	91	10	90	7	93	8	92	13	87	39	61	8	92
13. When I think about being a parent I have very mixed feelings.	29	71	29	71	27	73	29	71	26	74	50	50	26	74	22	78	33	67	27	73
14. Being a parent has been one of my greatest disappointments.	5	95	5	95	6	94	6	94	3	97	7	93	5	95	14	96	14	86	5	95

*Percent of agreement and disagreement across variables.